



Annual Report 2016

AdvoCard is a service user-led, independent advocacy organisation. Our services are primarily for people with experience of mental ill health in Edinburgh. We aim to provide opportunities for people to participate more effectively in decisions that affect all aspects of their lives. AdvoCard is committed to equality, inclusion and human rights.

- Individual mental health advocacy across the City of Edinburgh, and at the **Royal Edinburgh Hospital**
- **Community collective advocacy** for mental health service users in Edinburgh
- Individual advocacy for all prisoners in **HMP Edinburgh**
- Individual and collective advocacy for those affected by **welfare reform**

“AdvoCard is a place of hope, a place where aspirations can be fulfilled”

An AdvoCard service user

During the year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016:

- 1269 people received individual advocacy, up from 1171 last year
- 189 Mental Health Tribunals attended (148 last year)
- 214 referrals for welfare reform advocacy (133 last year)
- 133 people used the prison advocacy service (174 last year)

“The work of AdvoCard through its individual and collective advocacy services at the REH continues to be of huge importance”

Tim Montgomery, Operations Manager, Royal Edinburgh and Associated Services

“I have seen the great impact that the staff within AdvoCard have had with the individuals I worked with”

Danny Low, Senior Charge Nurse, Royal Edinburgh Hospital

Volunteer Advocacy

This year has once again seen the commitment and energy of our volunteers drive our community-based independent advocacy service. Not only do our volunteers give to us but recently they have been vocal in expressing all that they have gained from us. Leigh Matthews wrote the following for our volunteer newsletter:

"The role has given me so much: new skills, confidence, greater knowledge and understanding about the world, and most importantly for me, a sense of purpose"

Diane Hogg expressed her appreciation for the learning and training opportunities made available to her through volunteering with us:

"I found myself in so many different situations I could never have imagined and I learned something from every single one"

This year we have seen a surge in interest in our volunteer training programme which is promising and will enable us to continue to handle the large number of referrals we receive. Karina plans to increase volunteer involvement in the delivery of the initial training programme as well as volunteer support groups. In this last year a number of AdvoCard staff have spoken at volunteer support groups – this improves volunteer understanding of the various roles within the service and increases their knowledge in specific areas such as Welfare Reform and hospital-based advocacy. Staff and volunteers working together effectively ensures that we can continue to meet the ever-challenging demands of running a mental health advocacy service.

Mental Health Act Advocacy

We offered over 600 appointments this year, in addition to frequently dealing with many issues by phone and (less often) by email. The settings for those appointments provide a flavour of the range of work we do.

Roughly a third of appointments were at our office in Leith. Another third were at outside venues (such as community mental health teams, law firms, medical practices etc). A further third were at service users' homes or at temporary residences including hospitals and care homes. We regularly receive referrals for inpatients who have been detained in general hospital wards following a rapid deterioration in their health or as a consequence of a suicide attempt. In terms of NHS continuing care we have seen an increase in attending reviews brought about by changes in patients' tenancy conditions.

This year we welcomed Barbara Hunt as a part-time worker whom we were pleased to have recruited as she had previously been one of our volunteers.

We attended 32 mental health tribunals. We contributed to PhD research regarding compulsory treatment orders, presented to the Council's Health and Social Care Workers, attended the Mental Welfare Commission's launch of their film and publicity to promote advance statements and provided a session to our advocacy trainees.

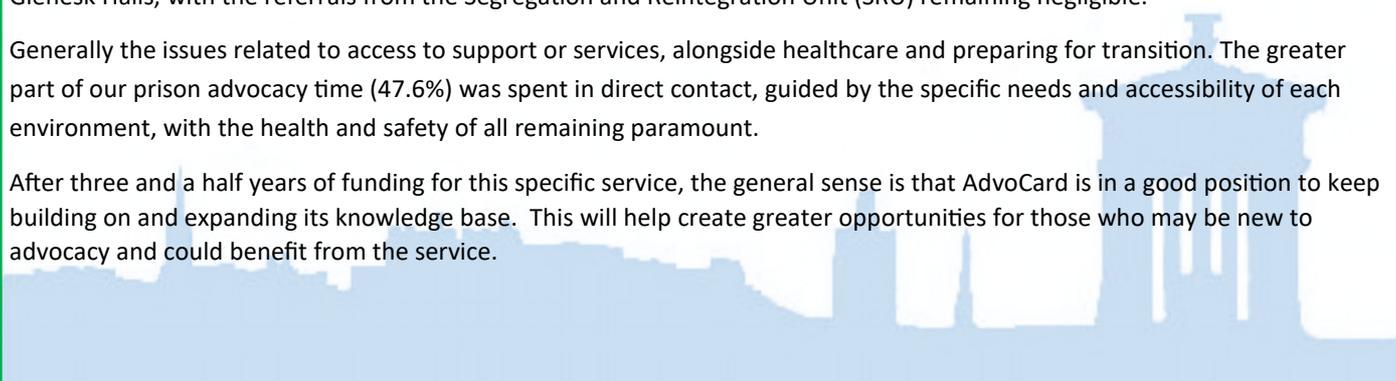
Advocacy in Edinburgh Prison

The Prison advocacy service has continued to develop and grow in its understanding and provision within the prison, with Peter and Barbara showing great flexibility of approach in maintaining our independence.

In the year to the end of March 2016, we met with 133 individuals, 79 of whom were self-referrals, with the majority of requests coming from Hermiston and Ingliston halls. There is ongoing work to build on the referrals from both Ratho and Glenesk Halls, with the referrals from the Segregation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) remaining negligible.

Generally the issues related to access to support or services, alongside healthcare and preparing for transition. The greater part of our prison advocacy time (47.6%) was spent in direct contact, guided by the specific needs and accessibility of each environment, with the health and safety of all remaining paramount.

After three and a half years of funding for this specific service, the general sense is that AdvoCard is in a good position to keep building on and expanding its knowledge base. This will help create greater opportunities for those who may be new to advocacy and could benefit from the service.



Royal Edinburgh Hospital Individual Advocacy

The individual advocacy service at the Royal Edinburgh hospital has continued to meet the challenges of delivering advocacy during times of uncertainty and change for the individuals we work with.

Over the year, we have worked with 510 individuals and attended 162 tribunals. The referrals in the main come from the acute wards and are generated either from the individual themselves, or the mental health officer, with issues generally around access to advocacy regarding their detention and tribunals, or access to ongoing support and services. Individuals increasingly experience difficulty in anticipating a point of discharge from the Hospital and the negotiating of appropriate available housing and longer term financial concerns can create delay.

We are very aware of the longer term needs of those individuals who require continued ongoing hospital support and have assisted some in their transition to longer term hospital care at Ellen's Glen House or those who need short term community supported rehabilitation in the recently developed Firrhill community transition resource.

An addition to our extended team came in March, when one of our advocacy workers, Scott and his wife became first time parents, with the birth of their son Wilson. We welcome Wilson and wish them as a family all the very best.

AdvoCard's continued thanks go to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Patients Council and Edinburgh Carers Council

Welfare Reform Advocacy

The main issues that the welfare reform service is being asked to address continue to be Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications and assessments. In total there were 214 referrals which can be split into 140 new referrals and 74 re-referrals from those who have used our Welfare Reform service previously. This is up from 107 referrals in the first year and 161 in the second.

Most people have now been migrated to ESA from Incapacity Benefit. However, this means that for many it is now time to be reassessed and go through the process again. For those who had a negative experience the first time, the prospect of facing reassessment can cause a great deal of anxiety and many are re-referring to AdvoCard for support with their Work Capability Questionnaires and subsequent assessments.

97% of those who sought advocacy support to make a claim and to attend an assessment were awarded benefit at a rate that they were happy with. For the 3% who were unhappy with the results, support was sought and given to lodge a mandatory reconsideration request with all but two of those being successful. Of those two who were unsuccessful, support was given to find an advice agency to appeal the matter.

The number of people seeing a deterioration in their mental health fell from 46% to 39% this year. This was perhaps, in part due to people being referred to the service earlier in the claims process. However, 57% of all those who were referred to AdvoCard specifically for issues relating to Welfare Reform reported that they felt more in control when working with advocacy.

Those who use our service were also able to contribute on a collective level with AdvoCard joining the Disability Benefits Consortium, who campaign for benefit change at Westminster and the steering group of the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform who campaign at Holyrood. Through these groups, people who use our service were supported to express their views on the changes that have been made to the benefits system.

We also joined with Inclusion Scotland, People First and Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living to find ways to help build resilience in people who are being effected by the benefit changes and supported people to contribute to a research study at Heriot Watt looking at how the Assessment process of ESA is effecting mental health.

Collective Advocacy

AdvoCard Community Collective Advocacy supports a number of groups including the open group Edinburgh Community Voices and the service-related groups at SEASONS, Redhall, the Crisis Centre, Cambridge Street (Community Mental Health Team service users) and the Service Improvement Group. We also engage with the Lothian Bipolar Group for occasional group meetings on specific issues.

Between September 2015 and February 2016, AdvoCard facilitated a collective peer research project, "A&E | All & Equal", where we engaged with people about their experiences in the Emergency Departments at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and St John's Hospital, Livingston. The research was led and delivered by a fantastic team of eleven volunteers, all of whom have lived experience of mental ill-health. The report has been published and is available on the AdvoCard website, and the project will continue to highlight people's experiences, raise awareness of the issues being faced and push for positive change.

AdvoCard has also been involved in progressing work around Advance Statements from a collective advocacy perspective, in tandem with the Mental Welfare Commission and Mental Health Network Greater Glasgow. This work enables service users and people with lived experience to explore the idea of writing an Advance Statement in a less intensely personal way and raises awareness of the opportunity for people with lived experience to write effective documents and, by doing so, a greater say in their care and treatment as and when the need arises.

The work on advance statements is part of a broader agenda to promote human rights within mental health in Edinburgh and has allowed us to develop links with Scottish Recovery Network, the national 'Rights of Life' agenda and the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

We have also enabled people with lived experience to contribute to consultations on the new Scottish Government Mental Health Strategy and the new NHS Lothian Mental Health Strategy.

Finally, we would like to say a big thank you to Sara Hvidsten who has stepped down as User Representative on the Edinburgh Crisis Centre Partnership Group. Sara has been a member of the group since the Crisis Centre was founded in 2006, and before that played a key role in campaigning for the Crisis Centre to be established.

Directors: Dianna Manson (Chair), Ian Broatch (Vice Chair), Karen Barr, Robert Montgomery, Dot Twyman, Alison Wagstaff. **Staff:** Karen Anderson, Arlene Astley, Ben Baldock, Jean Crombie, Elaine Dobbie, Barbara Filipowicz, Vincent Gill, Barbara Hunt, Katie James, Peter Le Riche, Becky Leach, Chris Mackie, Scott Murphy, Jenny Pope, Patricia Rodger, Shelley Romein, Devrim Türkay, Karina Williams. **Volunteers:** Blyth Crawford, Chiara Di Pasquale, Cleo Goodman, Dave Millar, Dougie Haig, Eric McLeod, George Coates, Hannah Ravalde, Ian Macintosh, John Murray, Karen Barr, Karen Sutherland, Kirsty McGrath, Laura Watson, Leigh Matthews, Linz Connell, Lisa Nowak, Lynne Sash, Lungowe Kashina, Mandy Wilson, Norma Arthur, Paul McInnery, Paul Wright, Rachel Maisey, Ruth Fulton, Sheena Wannan, Sophia Mouzi, Svitlana Innes, Veda Runge.

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